

## **Transcription: Vencil Mares**

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*Today is Thursday, October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011. My name is James Crabtree, and this afternoon I will be interviewing Mr. Vencil Mares. This interview is being conducted by telephone. Mr. Mares is at his place of business in Taylor, Texas, and I'm at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time out of your day to talk to us. It's an honor for us. The first question we always like to start with is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went in the military.*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, my daddy was a rancher and I stayed on the farm, and then I went to school until 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and then I decided to join the service at the age of 16.

*Where were you born?*

**Vencil Mares:** I was born in Fayette County.

*Fayette County, and you grew up on a ranch.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yes sir, until I was 16. I didn't finish school, but I joined the service at Fort Sam Houston.

*What year was that you went into the Army?*

**Vencil Mares:** I believe it was 1942.

*So do you remember then where you were when you learned that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?*

**Vencil Mares:** No, I was at home.

*When that happened though, and being a young man, did you think or did you want at that point to go into the military?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yes sir.

*What made you pick the Army?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, I saw a lot of people in need of help and they were mistreated well, you know, they needed help, so I decided to join the Army.

*And so you were living in Fayette County at the time?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yes sir.

*And so you went and signed up. How long was it from when you signed up to when they sent you to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, how long I was to sign up, I went to sign up with some other person, and when I signed my app there, I think I stayed home about a week or two and they sent me off to I believe it was San Luis Obispo, California was my boot camp.

*Oh, so they sent you to San Luis Obispo.*

**Vencil Mares:** California.

*How did your folks feel about you going into the military?*

**Vencil Mares:** They were willing to sign over. I had to sign to get in.

*Yeah, because you were under age, right?*

**Vencil Mares:** That's right. We stayed at boot camp about five months, and then I went to Needles, California, desert training, the whole outfit, 102<sup>nd</sup> \_\_\_\_ Hospital.

*Now how was it that you got assigned to be a medic?*

**Vencil Mares:** I think the way my IQ test, put me in that company there.

*So you scored pretty well on your test and they decided to make you a medic.*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, I'd say about an 80, 85, something like that. They grade you, yeah.

*And that wasn't something that alarmed you. You weren't afraid of needles or blood or that sort of thing.*

**Vencil Mares:** That's right, no.

*So I imagine then you went through your regular training and then at some point you went to training to become a medic, is that right?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yes sir, I went for training as a medic, the whole outfit, yeah.

*Tell us sir, a little bit about what that training was like.*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, we went to training and stayed in like where we hiked about 25 miles in a morning to break in, you know, and sleep on the mountains, kind of roughing it out, and went to school, the medic school, and at Needles, California for our desert training with a lot of sand and just teaching us what to do and what not to do, and we stayed there about 30 days, and then from there we went to New York at Camp Kilmer. We stayed there and waited until they built up enough troops to send us overseas. We landed in England and we stayed in private homes over there. The reason we stayed in private homes over there is because they didn't have no place for us to put us, so we stayed in private homes and waited for the invasion, and we went to medical school, class, stuff like that, training.

*Were you the youngest one in your unit?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yes sir.

*What was that like being the youngest? Did they treat you differently?*

**Vencil Mares:** Not really. There was one other boy about the same age that I am, the two youngest in that outfit there, and we went right straight on and they shipped us from Camp Kilmer from New York and stayed in private homes in England, and then we went to school a little bit there, waiting for the invasion, the Normandy Invasion.

*What were your thoughts? Were you excited or scared?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, not really because you really don't know what's going to happen, and they just, told us get ready for the invasion, get your stuff ready, be ready to set up stuff when we needed to set up, so we stayed around there, in the invasion was supposed to have been June the 2<sup>nd</sup>, and they didn't land because the weather was too bad, so they put it off until June the 6<sup>th</sup> of invasion, and it still was kind of rough, but anyway we stayed on this side and made the invasion June the 6<sup>th</sup>, and we lost about 8,000 men over there.

*Did you know that something big was coming at that point? Could you tell?*

**Vencil Mares:** I could tell that they carried the wounded, so we had to wait until they created a beach, and we're sitting on this side from England ready to go, you know, just to clear the beach up so we could go ahead and get set up before we can take care of the people that was hurt, and the ones that were dead, we wouldn't have had to, that was clear it off for the beach more or less, but it still was a little fire going on.

*So where were you on June 6<sup>th</sup>?*

**Vencil Mares:** Still in England.

*But you were getting ready to go.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah, we were ready to go but we had to wait because they had to get that beach cleaned up, you know, it was messed up.

*So when did you actually arrive? Do you remember the day?*

**Vencil Mares:** Probably about 10 days later, but the beach was still tore up when we landed, but it was more or less kind of cleared up though. Coming off them U-boats, you were running right into a firing range, where they were, where they would cut our soldiers down, but some of them woke up and they set that end gate down to get out, that was a mistake. So then they started leaving the end gate up so the German shooters run right into the firing rig, so that way everybody as soon as they reach the beach they just start shooting right in them pill boxes. That way you get the Germans to shoot back at you. So that's how some of the fellas got out or went and got on top and got behind them pill boxes, and went in the pill box and got the Germans out of there. So sink some hand grenades in there. And they also had a cross fire, overhanging cliff over that water, and they had a \_\_\_\_\_, so two-story deal, had the machine guns set up, and the rangers couldn't hardly climb then they tried. Of course most of them got killed. Then the way they got them, some of the boys I talked to some boys, some of the rangers got behind there somewhere and then he said well, we didn't do enough fighting up there. Well what did you do up there? Said we were stealing the ammunition from the Germans on top there. I said if you

say so, it was all right. And then we got the machine guns knocked out by somebody got a pole or somebody put a mirror on the end of the pole and it refracted the sun from the mirror showing exactly where the machine guns were. So that's how they knocked the machine guns out on that cliff there. Then they started moving on inland, setting up and got in where I got my equipment, set the tents up to take care of the wounded. Doctors and nurses, you had to get them set up with the machinery and light, and then just kind of move on.

*What was the name of the unit you were with?*

**Vencil Mares:** 102<sup>nd</sup> Evac.

*102<sup>nd</sup> Evac.*

**Vencil Mares:** The hospital, yes sir.

*So your job was to –*

**Vencil Mares:** Take care of the wounded, set up the units up right quick and take care of the patients, patch 'em up and get 'em to the doctors and stuff like that, and some of them had to get 'em out of the rain. Had a big tent set up for them.

*Would you often be at the Evac hospital, or were you out in the field with other units?*

**Vencil Mares:** Most of them went outside and inside, too, see, whatever you had to do, and so then a lot of times then later on, that was later on, but the Siegfried line that we lost a lot of, quite a few men right before they moved in towards Brest, France. That was a Navy, a fence, and Americans captured that, and straggled on down to St. Lo and some little river and worked towards Paris, as fast as we wound through and then went through Paris. Of course then the Germans by Munich was the crossing line, and then we set up over that, might have been in Geesle in Germany, a little town there, but anyway Ordane and then we went down to get set up for the Battle of the Bulge to Luxembourg City, and of course we were going down the line, and they kept reporting there was something going on, and they couldn't make out what was going on, but what happened the Germans had the big tanks under the ground on Frankfurt on the river there, and when that time came in where they crossed the river from that side to our side and coming up towards Luxembourg City, and that's where we were gonna set up but we got run out. But then to lose my commander there somewhere when we would go, said no, you get your men together and leave, but he wouldn't leave. So I never did find him. But I think the reason he didn't leave because he probably had a command from a higher office to stay there what's going on. But they lost a lot of men up there right on that Sendere Street.

*Let me ask you, sir, because I know a lot of people, myself included, are always amazed at the Corps men and the Navy that are with the Marines or the medics in your case in the Army, that are able in situations of combat to go and aid those that are hurt. I know when others are seeking cover, it's always the Corps man or the medic that runs to help those – did your training help prepare you for that? Because that's something that I think the average person doesn't understand.*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, yeah that done helped us to train there, take 'em out from behind the front lines or as close as you could and then bring him further back, so the outfit -

*When you got into combat for the first time and you were having to deal with real life casualties, what were you thinking at that time? Did your training just kind of kick in and it became automatic?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, more or less automatic. I knew what to do, just patch 'em up and carry 'em further back, you know, and get 'em to the doctors there, and then work on from there, you know, and keep 'em going because a lot of soldiers were wounded and they just needed help. And that wasn't such a thing as an 8-hour shift. That was a 24-hour shift. So you didn't get much sleep.

*I imagine that's right. Did you have many enemy wounded that you had to treat?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, I think just a few of 'em. There were not too many. Most of them were taken out, killed by our soldiers or whatever, and that wasn't our job to capture them, but I did run across one medic, he was from the German medic, and kind of make us saw him up there, and making me a motion to come up there to see him. So I said well, don't shoot me, but anyway I went down there and he asked, shook hands with me, and said would you get me help? Said I got some wounded soldiers down here and there, I got some of your American soldiers in there and I'm out of material. Well, I got some material, well use up what we can and we'll go from there. So we dug out all that and he went his way and I went my way.

*He was a German medic.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah.

*And he spoke English?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah, they all spoke, hell, they spoke better English than me and you. So anyway, so he went his way, we shook hands and he told me, know what he said, he said your blood is red and my blood is red.

*Wow.*

**Vencil Mares:** So more or less the German people didn't want to fight, but the leader, they couldn't disobey the leader because he chewed 'em.

*So he knew that you were a medic. How did he, because of what you were carrying or did you have a patch on?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah, I had a patch on, yes sir.

*Like a red cross?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah.

*So he saw that. Do you remember where you were when that happened?*

**Vencil Mares:** Where I was at, outside of Luxembourg City.

*And he saw you and signaled to you.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah, give me a signal or to come up that way. I said well, I'll go up there.

*What made you go? Like you mentioned, you didn't know if he might try to kill you or not.*

**Vencil Mares:** I could see he was a medic, had that van truck and had it open, you know, and was standing there, so I went up there.

*That's a great story.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yes sir, and the last 11 months, I had a friend I was keeping all the dog tags, the last 11 months, I would fight 11 months. We run 28,000 casualties through our tent.

*Wow. Did that wear on you after a while? Did you get kind of numb to the number of wounded you were having to deal with?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, it's better in a word, I mean just after you worked all the time so you never had any time to think that much. You just went on about your duty as you went along. Just like sometimes we had to go down to Brussels to get some supplies, so I and the commander went down to get supplies, but we had to drive in the mornings and stayed all day and stayed all night, deliver us up at night and then we'd get back to our outfit the next day. You had to do what you had to do.

*How was your unit set up? I think a lot of people are familiar with the movie and the television show MASH which was supposed to be set in Korea, but was your Evac hospital kind of like that in that it was a series of tents, kind of a mobile type Army hospital?*

**Vencil Mares:** No, well the way we had ours set up and then of course another big hospital further down was set up, but like a cross, you know, crossway, but we were kind of set up also like a T, t-shaped. The first camp that would be receiving tent, and then you have some sit tents on the side of it, down the line.

*But you were all in tents I guess is my question.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yes, put them tents on the side of it just like if you had a hospital unit, different tents for this and that. But they had a tent for receiving to start off and send them on down like a hospital setup, you know, t-shaped with tents set up like extra rooms, you know.

*Would you move pretty frequently? Were you always trying to stay fairly close to the front lines?*

**Vencil Mares:** No, not too far, well sometimes you didn't know how close away, we had times when we had to move to the company when they're gonna make an attack, we'd move just as close as we could to them.

*Exactly, so you would get closer to the casualties.*

**Vencil Mares:** That's right.

*Is it accurate to say that the Evac hospital's job was to try to stabilize the wounded and then send them back to the rear further so they could –*

**Vencil Mares:** Further back.

*And even eventually send 'em on home.*

**Vencil Mares:** The ones that was real bad hurt so we couldn't take care of 'em, so we sent them, there also was a hospital boat set up in the channel there, and then from there, the ones that were real bad, they would send them to Whale, England at the VA hospital there, send 'em up there on a helicopter or however they got 'em there.

*As a medic, did you ever take part in any of the emergency operations where they did surgeries?*

**Vencil Mares:** No, I didn't, that was for the doctors and nurses. We had nurses and other boys that helped the doctor, and I was just more or less kind of setting them up and get the patients, patch 'em up and give them some penicillin shots at night.

*When you ran into that German medic, what unit were you with at that time? Were you detached to another unit?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah, we were detached to another unit, yes sir.

*What was that like going from being in kind of a situation where you were in the hospital tents to being out with units on the front lines operating and maneuvering?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, the front line was just pretty tough, was tough anywheres, but we were losing a lot of casualties, each side, so you just had all you wanted to do there, and take 'em further back and get 'em set up, give them some pills and feed 'em. Some of them were cold, hungry, and stuff like that. I had my own tent. I had about 30 cots set up, so I would give them penicillin shots and the pills, whatever they need, patch 'em up until the doctors got to 'em.

*Sure. I'm sure the guys in the unit, even when you're just attached to 'em, had to have wanted to know who you are because they knew that you were the one that could potentially save them.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yes sir.

*Did you get to know some of the soldiers pretty well?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, there were so many, and different states and all that, you couldn't tell.

*When you would be detached to a unit like you were when you ran into that German medic, how long were you with them? Do you remember if it was for just a few days?*

**Vencil Mares:** Just a few days, a day or two, yes sir.

*Did you carry a weapon?*

**Vencil Mares:** No, only time we carried a weapon is when we had to walk the guard. We had a .45 and a carbine.

*So when you go out with the units on the front line, you just basically had your medical kit with you.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yes sir, you had to have your medical. You didn't carry no guns.

*And then was it an armband that had the red cross on it?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yes sir.

*And what about your helmet? Was there any marking on it?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well yeah, you had a marking on your helmet.

*A red cross on the front of the helmet.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yes sir.

*I think that is even more amazing to folks that you're in a combat situation and you're not even armed and you're just there to help folks.*

**Vencil Mares:** They weren't supposed to shoot us. Of course we did lose some of the medics, but they would crawl up where there was wounded up in the front line trying to get them out to safety, and went back to us further back, see.

*How long were you in Europe for total?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, total, I stayed in the woods about 27 months in the woods.

*During that time, I know you were in France, and Luxembourg.*

**Vencil Mares:** Luxembourg, yeah, we were at Luxembourg. We lost a lot of men there. That's where I lost my commander. We had three soldiers were already wounded there, and had them at an old house to get them out of the rain and the cold weather, snow and wet, and the Germans were coming already, and the big Tiger tanks, and there was a send there that the commander told us it was horrible, to get my men together and get going, get gone, get out of there. But they were coming and they weren't taking no prisoners to what I understood was. Said what are you going to do, commander? And they was kept and lost him. What do you mean you're staying? You're going to be dead or held. I said that ain't no good, but he wouldn't go, but reason he probably didn't go because he probably had a high commander to tell him what's going on.

*So he remained behind in a building then. That was in Luxembourg?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah, it was in a building. We was on top of that mountain and was gonna set up over there. Luxembourg was right below us.

*So he told you and your men to get out, but he stayed there with the radio operator?*

**Vencil Mares:** No, he stayed with them 30 patients there. One of them was a German patient.

*Oh, patients, OK.*



**Vencil Mares:** And he told me, said you get your men together and you get out of here because they're coming. I said what are you going to do? I'm staying. I said what do you mean staying? Said man, you'll be a dead hero. But I got to thinking, well, he must've had a higher commander stake with us, you know.

*So you got out of there then?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah, we got out of there. We just went and got in a jeep and left.

*How long was it before you found out what had happened to him?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, I was waiting for him that next day, about two or three days later then we kind of had meetings of the unit, whole unit, but he wasn't there and nobody seen him, so I guess somebody captured him and took him because I don't know what happened. I never did find him. I tried to find out.

*They never found out what happened to him?*

**Vencil Mares:** No, trying to find out after I got home in the States and the Navy still couldn't find him, so they must've captured him I guess. I almost started to take some boys and load them on a jeep and take him with whether he liked it or not, but he said he was staying. There just wasn't too much we could do about it.

*Sure. And then at some point you were with units that advanced into Germany, is that right?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah.

*What was that like when you got into Germany? Did you encounter many German civilians?*

**Vencil Mares:** No, I didn't see hardly any. They'd fall right out of our way, and hid further back somewhere because I guess it was just mostly soldiers, you know.

*Did you have a pretty good feel for how the war was going? Did it seem like we were gonna win while you were there?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, it was a hard one. I'll tell you, we lost, because the Germans had a lot of soldiers and had a lot of equipment. They were prepared, but we weren't prepared that well but we had enough soldiers and equipment to keep fighting back, so according to the book on that Sendera, there our soldiers come out with their hands up, and they just got mowed down.

*Yeah, that's right, I read the Malmady Massacre.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah, so we lost about, according to \_\_\_\_, on that battle of the Battle of the Bulge, that was the last site, last push. So we lost about 80,000 men there in that area. Said the British lost 5,000 and Canadians lost 3,000 and we lost 80,000, and the Germans lost 120,000.

*Were you able to get much news while you were there? Did you kind of know what was going on with the rest of the war, other battles, that sort of thing?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, I figured that we kept advancing because we wasn't getting pushed back anymore, so we felt it was just sweat it out, sweat it out, just like across the fence, you know.

*Sure, you could tell you were going the right direction then. You weren't being pushed back.*

**Vencil Mares:** We weren't getting pushed back so I figured that we were moving on.

*Were you able to get mail from home?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, sometimes I guess I'd get a letter, but we'd get some, yeah, but I guess a lot of times they said they never got there, but I wasn't there.

*Did you have any brothers and sisters?*

**Vencil Mares:** I have two brothers and a sister.

*Were any of them in the service?*

**Vencil Mares:** All three of us.

*All three brothers were.*

**Vencil Mares:** My oldest brother was up, that's where I saw him at in France, \_\_\_\_, I saw him at the Rhein bridge and river, and my youngest brother he went to the Korean War.

*He was in the Korean War.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah.

*So you saw your older brother while you were both serving?*

**Vencil Mares:** Saw him \_\_\_\_.

*In Europe. How did that happen? Was that just a random thing?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, for some reason I was going down to the tent after something and somebody called. It was my brother. He found out where I was at. He had drove an ambulance to bring the patient back, and that's how he found out see where I was at, so he come down there.

*Wow. I'm sure that was the last person you expected to see in Europe was your brother.*

**Vencil Mares:** Right.

*How long were you able to visit with him?*

**Vencil Mares:** Oh, maybe 30 minutes. I believe he had to go.

*And then you saw him again at the Rhein?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah, I saw him at the Rhein bridge out there, going to Frankfurt.

*That's amazing.*

**Vencil Mares:** Then I didn't see him no more until we got home.

*Wow, that's great.*

**Vencil Mares:** We were kind of lucky that we made the invasion, succeeded on it. Because if they had them big tanks up there, we'd never made it. They had a lot of dummy tanks around. I'm going back to the invasion. Ride a dummy, tanks made out of rubber.

*That's right.*

**Vencil Mares:** Then our units kept thinkin' it was the German tanks. It wasn't, it was made out of rubber. It was dummies.

*Even then though it was very fierce fighting.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah, it was hard to tell, you know. It was fierce fighting. Some of them didn't get close enough to the bank and then some of them drowned even before they hit the beach, you know. Of course it just upset everybody. You had a lot of people helping, haul and pull you up, but we couldn't, they didn't want you to stop for help because if you stayed there and tried to help anybody quick on that beach, you'd have gotten shot, too. So we had to keep movin' on until we got set up a little further. Then there was two more invasions going off to the right, Omaha and Utah.

*That's right. Wow. And your folks back home were still running the ranch while you were gone?*

**Vencil Mares:** No, they already passed away.

*Oh they had.*

**Vencil Mares:** Just me and my sister.

*When did your folks pass away?*

**Vencil Mares:** I think my father, my mother passed when she was 92, and then my father passed about 82.

*I guess my question, sir, was when you were in the war in Europe, your folks were alive and running the ranch.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yes sir.

*I guess you were really young so you weren't even married yet, is that right?*

**Vencil Mares:** No, I wasn't, I turned 21 when I was in the middle of the ocean coming home. So I served my time and sorry I didn't but afraid I was gonna be a rancher back in, but there was no work when you got out.

*Let me ask you real quick, do you remember where you were when you learned that the Germans had surrendered?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah, I was just outside of Luxembourg City looking over the Luxembourg City. We were trying to set up but they finally gave up because the English came in and hit ‘em from one side, and then the Canadians from the other side, and we were coming in force -

*How did you learn the war was over?*

**Vencil Mares:** They called in, you know.

*They called in. And what was that moment like?*

**Vencil Mares:** Be like you were going back to celebrate.

*I imagine it had to have been an exciting moment to learn that it was finally over.*

**Vencil Mares:** That’s right. Of course we stayed a few \_\_\_\_ had to take care of the hospital, and we had to take care of the other companies took over, you know. But we hit the bottle pretty hard that evening.

*Yeah, I imagine.*

**Vencil Mares:** I tell you, a dead man felt better than I did the next day.

*That’s funny.*

**Vencil Mares:** But that’s the way it wound up, so we waited ‘til our turn, whoever had the most points and then they had a chance to go home when they got a load.

*And you’d been in for a while, so you had quite a few points then.*

**Vencil Mares:** Oh yeah.

*So you were one of the earlier ones to head back.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah.

*What was it like coming back home after having been gone and fought in a war?*

**Vencil Mares:** I couldn’t get home fast enough. It took us 14 days on a boat, leave France and then we landed in Norfolk, Virginia. You had to disperse over there and then separate which trains were going to New York and Washington DC and some to Houston, so we had to take the train from Norfolk, Virginia, on troop trains. So we got ‘em all separated who was going where and so I went to Tyler, Texas is where I went, so it took me five days to get home.

*Got to Tyler and then how did you get back to Fayette County?*

**Vencil Mares:** I took the bus to Houston and from Houston I caught a train. And I got off at Flatonia, Texas. That's the nearest town to my folks. So I got off. I come home Christmas morning.

*Wow, that's quite a Christmas gift. Christmas morning of 1945?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yes sir, 1945, got home at 6 o'clock in the morning.

*Wow. Did your folks know you were coming home that day?*

**Vencil Mares:** No, but my brother, I didn't know if he was still alive or what, but anyway when I got off that train, I knew all the front country. I just kind of cut across the woods there to get on the highway there, and then 13 miles to our house so I just started walking. I had me a little satchel and I saw a car coming and I said well, I'm gonna catch me a ride. But anyway I set that satchel on the side of the road and I backed off in the ditch out there and I'm gonna catch me a ride. So the first car passed it, stopped and backed up. So I was standing there with the little sack there. Said where are you going, soldier? I says I'm going to Cistern, Texas. Well you know what? That's where I'm going. It was my brother.

*It was your brother!*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah. We drove about two blocks before we knew who was who.

*Wow, that's amazing and that was Christmas morning.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yes sir.

*Describe the reaction of your parents when you both got to the house that morning.*

**Vencil Mares:** Oh, they were glad to see us.

*I bet. Did your mom start crying?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, she was busy, she hugged my neck and stuff.

*I can't imagine a better –*

**Vencil Mares:** Company already, got the Christmas Day comin'.

*I can't imagine a better surprise on Christmas morning than for her, your mom and dad to have their two sons come home from the war.*

**Vencil Mares:** So I stayed home by the weekend and I started lookin' for a job. So I turned all my money over. We had no use for it. I didn't spend it, I didn't go nowhere, and I didn't think I had one day off in 227 days, no 27 months.

*Wow, then at that point you decided to go into barbecue, is that right?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, I really didn't want to. I just wanted a job because I stayed at home looking at the walls and just takin' kind of \_\_\_ stuff coming in. You had to look around and see

what I wanted to do. My daddy had a bunch of cattle, but still it was, needed some money to be comin' in, you know. You got to sell them cattle once a year, maybe twice a year or whatever, but I found my job in a meat market.

*In Flatonia?*

**Vencil Mares:** No, in Elgin, Texas.

*Elgin, OK.*

**Vencil Mares:** I worked in Southside Market for three years and then I said well, if I can make money for him, I can make money for myself, and I'm young enough and I got enough stashed away that I saved from the Army, and I can string along and if I don't make it, I'm young enough to do something else. So I was thinking ahead.

*That's right. Wow. Did it seem like something that came pretty easy to you, because I know it's not an easy business being in the restaurant business -*

**Vencil Mares:** I'd have ever known this, I'd never got into it. Man, you're married to the thing. I ain't coming in to work today, all that kind of stuff.

*You started your own place in is it 1948?*

**Vencil Mares:** 1948 when I bought this place.

*And you've been going since.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah, I bought it with the money that I saved from the Army.

*Wow.*

**Vencil Mares:** So that way it was paid for when I got then I started building my stock of beer and whatever I needed.

*How did you learn how to make barbecue?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, at Southside Market they had a barbecue pit there. I worked there, you know, for three years.

*So you just kind of learned on the job.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah.

*Wow, that's great.*

**Vencil Mares:** Man, I tell you, if I ever knew it'd be that much work, I'd never got into it. I had a chance to get a meat market with my cousin, and that was a mistake. That would've been a good deal. The boys made a bunch of money and they retired and they got land bought up, but they all passed away so I don't know what happened.

*Well I think all the customers you've had over the years are probably grateful that you did go into the restaurant business.*

**Vencil Mares:** Oh yeah, they don't want to hear me say I'm quitting. No, you can't leave sir, we got no place to go.

*That's right.*

**Vencil Mares:** I tell you one thing, how I've built my business up, I've built up a lot of friends. You know that I get a lot of customers, a lot of people come from New Sweden, Germany, France, England, and then from all over the state.

*Yeah, I think there's people that know barbecue and they travel to eat it.*

**Vencil Mares:** They come here on a tour, they'll come on back. They say we're coming down there, just last week. They come once a year. There's 30 of them.

*How did you come to arrive in Taylor because you were from Flatonia.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah, well my cousin, I started working in Elgin and then I was living in Taylor, driving back and forth to work, so that's how I got into Taylor. I lived in a little old apartment, so I drove back and forth to work there at Elgin, that was 17 miles from here.

*Did you ever get married?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah, I got married one time, one time too many.

*One time too many.*

**Vencil Mares:** But that's all right. Well, like everything else, they need lovin' just like everybody else do, you know. I married young and -

*This was right after the war?*

**Vencil Mares:** Right after the war, yeah, got out. Of course I got out of the service in December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1945, 9 o'clock December 10 Tyler, Texas.

*Did you have any children?*

**Vencil Mares:** I got one boy, yeah.

*One boy.*

**Vencil Mares:** One boy that's married and then didn't quite work out. She was a lot younger than I was.

*Did he get into the barbecue business, too?*

**Vencil Mares:** No, no, man, I wouldn't have – no, I sent him to school, you know. So he's 60 years old now. He went to \_\_\_ sent him through college, so then he finally got married, and made enough money we'll give him, my business was good, so I gave him enough money to build his house.

*I wanted to ask you with your name, what is your ancestry? You kind of have a bit of an accent and I can't figure out what your accent is.*

**Vencil Mares:** Part of Austria, something like that, some of it, and then Bohemian.

*Some Austrian and Bohemian?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah.

*At first I almost thought you had kind of a Cajun type accent.*

**Vencil Mares:** I always tell 'em I'm a cross between a milk cow and a billy goat.

*Well I couldn't quite place it, so that's why -*



**Vencil Mares:** I got to go check on my voice. My voice has been low. I got to get a tank – anyway, my health is good.

*That's good.*

**Vencil Mares:** I'll be 88 next month, in November.

*And you still go into the restaurant every day.*

**Vencil Mares:** I get up 5:30 every morning. I'm up there drinking coffee and see what I need, get my help lined up.

*That probably keeps you young.*

**Vencil Mares:** Oh yeah, why I want to stay in the house and look at the wall?

*Yeah, well I think you're probably right. There's some studies out there that prove that, too.*

**Vencil Mares:** Argue with politicians up there, and not for sure but I hear that every day argument.

*I think there's probably, I think they've scientifically proven that by staying active it keeps you alert and young.*

**Vencil Mares:** You know if they come in, they don't see me, say where's Vencil? Well, you got to talk to the people. You got to be a salesman behind the counter, and I've been there about 55 years here.

*And I bet you've seen a lot of change in Taylor and Williamson County.*

**Vencil Mares:** Oh yeah, right.

*Because in 1948, I mean Williamson County was a rural place and now it's like a big suburb.*

**Vencil Mares:** I have this old building, this building is over about 110, 112 years old. It's right on Main Street just next to the railroad, and we used to have two counters and the clerks, and at that time it wasn't anyways they had colored seats on one side, white and Spanish on this side. That's the way it looked to integrate. I didn't make any difference. Only if they behave theirself, I didn't care. If you behave, you sit on either side, and I was 21 years and wasn't much of a man. I wasn't scared of a booger.

*Well, that's a lot of history.*

**Vencil Mares:** I get a lot of people from different states come in and get 'em out of New York, get 'em out of Washington DC. In fact I got some, about 8 or 10 of them, a family they come from Russia. I said how in the hell did you find me? They said right in, I've been in every book and magazine, I'm not bragging myself, but I tell you the way the Swedes have a good time, they've been coming here the last 34 years. They come every year, about 30 of 'em. They call in and say well, we're coming in. How many? 30. You fix us some barbecue up there and we

sit family style, set at your own table there, fix it up, they eat around and dance and drink beer and they have a good time. Then when they get through eating and drinking, they call the man out of Austin to come pick them back up, they're ready to come home.

*Oh that's great.*

**Vencil Mares:** Oh yeah, a lot of stuff going. That first one I had 'em about three times a week and had no shirt left, but I straightened 'em all out. They like it. Now I have a lot of friends back me up, ain't starting trouble, and ain't nobody gonna – we had \_\_\_\_\_. If you're going to start trouble or try to start a fight, somebody got to go.

*What's the secret to having had a business be as successful as yours all these years? Is it just hard work?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, it's a lot of long work. In the food business, you got to do it right. If you're going to put out something, you got to make it taste good and everything, go around to 'em, ask 'em how is your food, it's all right? I said you tell me yes or no because you won't make me mad. If you don't tell me you don't like it, you won't be back and I can't correct it. I can correct it if you tell me to and I'll see what I need to do. I've cooked about 15 boxes every week, those 80-lb. mixes. I used to do a lot of catering, too. I built up the catering, where it's good money. Feed 500 people, 1,000, 700, whatever and that way you don't have all that overhead, see, and get your price for it, and what's left over you can keep it. What you order 500? Well you pay for 500. You can do what you want with it.

*That's a great story.*

**Vencil Mares:** I fed the Shriner's a couple of time out of Austin. They had about 6,000 people.

*That's a lot of people to feed.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah. Across the river there in oh, what's that building – right across the river there.

*In Austin?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yeah. So I set me up downstairs I set up 10 lines and then I had 'em coming on both sides. Only thing I served is beef and sausage, and the rest of it you help yourself. And it took me about a hour and a half to feed about 6,000 people.

*Amazing. Well sir, I really appreciate you taking the time to let us interview you today. This program really is about preserving history for posterity, and we have items here at the Land Office that go back to the 1600s. We have the original register of settlers that Stephen F. Austin kept in his own hand. We have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo. So our hope is that even hundreds of years from now, people can listen to these interviews and perhaps learn something they didn't otherwise know and with that in mind is there anything that you'd want to say to somebody maybe listening to this interview a couple of hundred years from now after you and I are long gone?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well I'm gonna be 88 next month. It'll be about 12 more years to live up to 100, and then I'm gonna decide what I'm gonna do.

*Is there anything you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview a hundred years from now about your service or any advice or anything?*

**Vencil Mares:** Yes sir. I get a lot of people out here from different states. I get 'em out of California. In fact I get some out of Japan, and they come around, they make a tour a lot of 'em, people that are taking cooked barbecue and try to make it, so they come check out and see what I got and check it out. I even had some out of Japan. I said what can I do for you? I says are you gonna cook barbecue in Japan? Said no, I'm trying to learn how to cook. So that time I got in front of the pit and show 'em how it works and what you need to do. But actually a person could make good money by teaching 'em, you know. I know down in Kansas City what they do, they get about 500 people, a lot of people and they charge them \$5,000 or whatever for say a week of food and staying there for a week and teaching them how. That makes big money on that. And your keggers makes you good money, too. But sometimes I didn't get much sleep. Got many stuff going on, about six trucks to go out and get them people lined up, this is your crimp board and this is what you got there, and this is where you're going. You load your own truck up and you go serve it and come back.

*Sir, if there is anything you could say to somebody about your service, what would you say about your time in the military?*

**Vencil Mares:** Well, 34 months I served altogether. I was in 34 months in service, and the war ended and so we quit, and then I come on home.

*Yes sir, well again, I really again I want to thank you for letting us interview you, and more important –*

**Vencil Mares:** No problem. I just about in every magazine and book and monthly magazines and Texas Roads and all that kind of stuff.

*We also want to thank you, too, sir for your service to our country, and a big part of this program is also thanking our veterans for their service.*

**Vencil Mares:** Yes sir. You live in Austin?

*Yes sir.*

**Vencil Mares:** Sometime you can take a break and come down to Taylor, Texas and come to town. When you hit the main street you turn to your right.

*Yes sir, absolutely I'll do that and I'll bring out the –*

**Vencil Mares:** Give you a free barbecue.

*Yes sir, I'll bring the copies of the CDs we're gonna make for you as well as a nice letter and certificate from Commissioner Patterson. Again, we really thank you for your service to our country.*

**Vencil Mares:** That's no problem, sir. And thanks for calling and if you get a break, come on down.

*Will do.*

**Vencil Mares:** I don't have the nicest place but we keep it clean.

*Yes sir, well the food is the important thing.*

**Vencil Mares:** I got a waitress looking at me. She wants to go home. She's been with me about 15 years. Boy, she's good. Wish I had about two more like that.

*Yes sir.*

**Vencil Mares:** I could get a little more sleep. Anyway, you find some time you want to drive to Taylor, Texas and come right downtown. I'm right on the bridge on Main Street on my side of the railroad.

*Yes sir.*

**Vencil Mares:** We're open 7 days a week.

*All right sir, we'll talk to you soon.*

**Vencil Mares:** Thanks for calling. I appreciate you taking time.

*Thank you.*

*[End of recording]*